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**Speech for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada,
Vic Toews, Q.C.**

**Canadian Club of Winnipeg
Tackling Crime: What We Have Accomplished and Where We Are Going**

**September 7, 2006
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Introduction

Thank you, [MC], for your kind introduction.

I am always glad to be back here in Winnipeg. For the last week or so, I've been travelling across southern and western Ontario talking about what our Government has accomplished to date and what lies ahead. It has been an interesting and useful experience. Still, it is good to get back among the familiar sights and sounds of the province where I grew up; for me, Manitoba will always be home.

It is a privilege, as well, to be addressing the Canadian Club of Winnipeg. For more than a century, the Club has been a special part of the life of this city, and it has played host to a distinguished array of speakers over the years. And I can strongly identify with the mission of the national Association of Canadian Clubs: "To share and promote our passion for Canada."

Allow me, then, to share with you some reflections on something that I feel passionate about, something that is vital to the well-being of this country: the need to fight the threat of crime so communities across Canada can be safe and secure.

I'm sure we would all agree that safe streets and low crime rates are essential elements to a healthy community. When an area is known to be safe, when it is home to a friendly and vibrant community, people feel confident about going there—whether to do business or to raise their families.

This Government understands these needs. We have taken leadership to strengthen communities and assist millions of ordinary, hard-working Canadians.

- We're helping Canadians get ahead by cutting taxes, including a cut to the GST.
- We've introduced a real child-care plan: parents have already begun receiving child-care cheques worth $1,200 a year for each child under six.
- We are moving toward a Patient Wait Times Guarantee.
- To restore your faith in accountable, responsible government, we've introduced the most sweeping accountability measures in our country's history.
- And we are working on protecting families and Canada's way of life by cracking down on guns, gangs and drugs.

On behalf of Canada's New Government, I have had the honour of being the Manitoba representative in the federal cabinet. Working alongside such capable Manitoba MPs as Joy Smith and Rod Bruinooge who are in attendance today, along with the entire Manitoba Conservative Caucus, we have been proud of the progress we've made for this province since taking office.

For instance, we have delivered for Manitoba farmers. We recently committed $550 million to the Manitoba Farm Families Options Program. Through this innovative program, we can offer real help to struggling farmers and their families by providing short-term financial relief, while helping them find ways to improve their income for the long term.

This Government is equally committed to investing in our manufacturing industries here in Manitoba. In July, we announced a contribution of $1.5 million from the Canada-Manitoba Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) toward the Vehicle Technology Centre project. This project will encourage local manufacturers and suppliers to work together to identify opportunities for new technology and other improvements in Manitoba's transportation-supply industry.

We are also working to ensure the safety and security of Manitobans by delivering on our commitment to expand the Red River Floodway project and protect communities from additional flooding.

Over the past months, we have also been working with both the Province of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg to support the new Outreach Patrol program, which was announced just last month. The Outreach Patrol will help make this city's streets safer and friendlier by using a combination of prevention, intervention and enforcement strategies in dealing with intoxicated and disorderly persons.

I also know that international developments over the spring and summer have had special significance to many people in Manitoba , in particular the recent conflict between the state of Israel and Hezbollah. I'm proud of our government's principled stand on this critical foreign policy issue. We worked with the international community to develop a strong position that has led to what we hope is a durable and lasting peace. At the same time, our government's position has been rooted in the values of democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law. We stood up, and will continue to stand up, for Israel's right to defend herself from aggression and terrorist threats.

Canadians have made it abundantly clear that our country should never back down from terrorism, and we remain committed to the vital mission in Afghanistan. Through the Prime Minister's leadership, Canada's New Government has taken action to help Afghanistan become a stable and self-sufficient state so that it will never again serve as a terrorist haven, and threaten global and Canadian security.

Tackling Crime

Here at home, Canada's New Government has made a firm commitment to make Canada's streets and communities safer. We have made tackling crime one of our top five priorities. And it is a goal that Canadians want to see achieved. As Minister of Justice, I am working with the Minister of Public Safety, Stockwell Day, to follow through on this commitment.

Canadians are fed up with the soft approach to crime that has been taken for so long. They want their Government to get tough on criminals and send a clear message that violence will not be tolerated in our communities.

And we've been doing something about it. I'm pleased to be able to talk about some of that progress we've already made, in seven short months, with you today.

This spring, we introduced five new bills that will make our communities safer.

We proposed reforms to our laws on conditional sentencing, so people who commit serious and violent crime will serve their time behind bars—not at home or in the community.

We introduced our mandatory minimum penalties bill to send a clear message that gun crimes will not be tolerated.

Our Government has moved to strengthen our National DNA Data Bank legislation to help our police identify the guilty and exonerate the innocent. The data bank has already proven itself to be a powerful crime-solving tool for police and prosecutors. It has helped provide crucial leads in some unsolved cases, such as the 1984 murder of Mrs. Beverley Dyke, here in Winnipeg. Thanks to DNA evidence, a first-degree murder charge has now been laid against a man who was in prison for a separate crime.

We have also introduced new legislation to increase the maximum penalties for offences that involve street racing, a reckless and dangerous act that kills all too often.

And finally, we introduced legislative proposals that would raise the age of consent from 14 to 16 years, to ensure our children are better protected from sexual predators.

In addition to these bills, our new Government tabled legislative amendments to end the long-gun registry, and focus enforcement on criminals who use guns. Our Government believes that enforcement should be focused on criminals who use guns, not law-abiding long-gun owners like farmers and duck hunters.

To back up these commitments, we provided funding in the 2006 Budget to begin recruiting more RCMP personnel and federal prosecutors, to expand the RCMP Training Academy, to further strengthen the National DNA Data Bank and to prevent youth crime.

This approach is meant to be tough, but at the same time, it's balanced. It respects the rights of the accused but does not allow their rights to take precedence over community safety.

Budget 2006

To help us meet our commitment to keeping our communities safe, the 2006 Budget delivered the resources needed.

- The Budget provides $15 million to further strengthen the National DNA Data Bank, which I have just been discussing.

- The Budget includes $26 million to give victims a more effective voice in the federal corrections and justice system, and to give victims greater access to services, such as help with travel to appear at parole hearings.

- We set aside $20 million for communities to prevent youth crime, with a focus on guns, gangs, and drugs. In fact, quite recently I had the pleasure of announcing more than $2 million in funding to support 26 crime-prevention initiatives in Manitoba. These types of crime prevention programs are important, and they work. But as I always take care to point out, they work only if the gunmen and drug dealers who put youths at risk are taken off the streets first.

- The Budget earmarked funds to give the RCMP the tools and people it needs to strengthen its federal policing role.Just last week, the Government announced that we will invest nearly $200 million to hire and train 1000 new RCMP personnel and upgrade the RCMP Training Academy in Regina.

- Finally, we reserved $101 million to begin arming border officers and eliminating "work-alone" posts. Prime Minister Harper also announced last week that the Canadian Border Services Agency will hire another 400 permanent border officers. It is clear that these measures will equip our border officers to better maintain a safe and secure border for Canada.

Continuing our Commitment

But our commitment does not end with these measures. For example, recent events have underscored the importance of ensuring that we have effective measures in place to safeguard our communities—and our children—from known dangerous offenders .

I am committed to working with my provincial and territorial counterparts in the coming months to see what more we need to do on this critical matter. We want to ensure that all communities across the country will have the same level of protection from known dangerous offenders.

We also intend to review laws regarding sentencing and bail, particularly those that deal with long-term offenders, along with repealing the "faint hope" clause of the *Criminal Code*.

But strengthening the justice system means more than getting tough on crime and supporting law enforcement.

Last month, in my speech to the Canadian Bar Association, I talked about the ways we can make the justice system more accountable to Canadians, more efficient in the way it serves justice, more accessible to those who need it, and more responsive, particularly to the victims of crime.

Accountable

First, accountability. This past spring, our Government began making strides in making the system more accountable and open.

For the first time in our history, a nominee for the Supreme Court of Canada was interviewed publicly by Members of Parliament from all parties. That led to the appointment of Manitoba's own Mr. Justice Marshall Rothstein in April.

This public interview process is consistent with our Government's commitment to openness and accountability. And opening up the process this way can only promote public confidence in the courts.

Efficient

Efficiency of the system must also be addressed. When I meet with my provincial and territorial counterparts this October, we will be discussing the recommendations of the federal/provincial/territorial Steering Committee on Justice Efficiencies and Access to the Justice System.

The Department of Justice is looking at a number of the Committee's recommendations on things like mega-trials; effective management of cases going to trial; and the process of early case consideration—that is, putting mechanisms in place to ensure that the merits of both the Crown and defence cases are taken into account early on in a trial process. My department is also measuring the impact of amendments to Bill C-15A (The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2001) that are designed to shorten and simplify the process of the preliminary inquiry.

Improving efficiency goes beyond mere cost-cutting. It is ensuring that every step of the process contributes to a just result by working the way it is intended to work.

To this end, our government has already introduced Bill C-23, which responds to issues identified by provincial and territorial justice partners across Canada by making certain processes more effective through greater use of technology and by consolidating and rationalizing existing provisions.

Accessible

Our efforts to make the system more efficient also go a long way to making it more accessible. And one key factor that can limit access is the growing length and complexity of trials, and the pressures they create on the courts.

No one expressed that sentiment better than Justice Michael Moldaver of the Ontario Court of Appeal when he addressed the Criminal Lawyers' Association last October.

Reading the speech myself, I was struck by Justice Moldaver's frankness on this subject, which served to drive the point home. For instance, regarding criminal trials, he said, "Sadly, they have taken on a life of their own, and if they haven't already done so, they are fast becoming the masters of a system they are meant to serve."

His impassioned plea was directed to all the major stakeholders—legislators, judges, Crown attorneys, police and defence counsel—to make a concerted effort to reduce the length of criminal trials.

Responsive

Our efforts to produce a stronger and more effective justice system must also include being responsive, particularly to the victims of crime. The Government of Canada has a special responsibility in this area, and we are committed to act on the rights and concerns of victims. Over the years, the system has suffered from a dangerous perception that the rights and voices of victims in the criminal justice system were being marginalized or even ignored.

In response, our 2006 budget included funding to give victims a more effective voice in the federal corrections and justice system and greater access to services. These resources will help us continue initiatives that work and develop new ones.

Conclusion

Over the past seven months, our Government has taken concrete measures to fulfill our commitment to make the justice system more efficient, more accountable and more responsive to the needs of the people it serves. Along with our other initiatives—our five new laws, our plan for effective gun control, our investments in safety and security— they represent a balanced yet tough approach to combating crime and improving the justice system as a whole. Criminals will no longer be coddled. Their rights will not trump those of their victims, or take precedence over community safety.

With these strong reforms we, as a nation, are fighting back against crime. We are taking back our streets and standing up for our communities. We are restoring and building on Canada's reputation as a peaceful country.

In the election campaign, we said we'd tackle crime. This spring, we followed through. We are getting things done for families and taxpayers. And this fall, we will continue to move forward confidently to help make this great country—and the great province of Manitoba—a safer, more secure place to live and grow.

Thank you.

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